

PICTURE PLAYS

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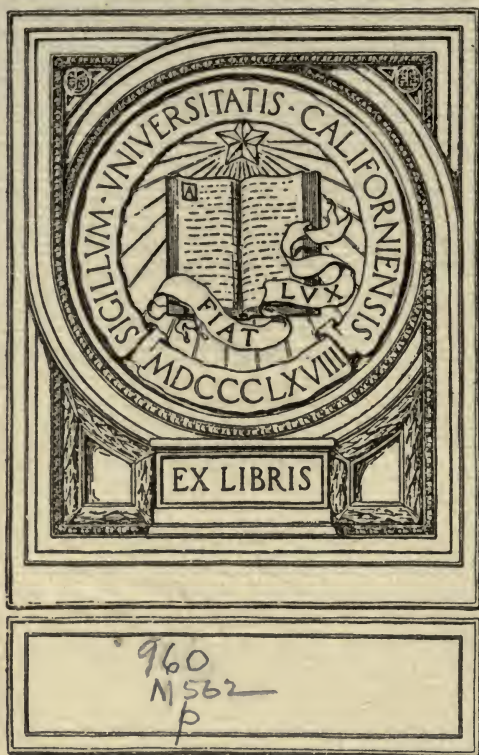


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MARGUERITE MERINGTON

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PICTURE PLAYS

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

“CRANFORD: A PLAY.” By Marguerite Merington. A comedy in three acts made from Mrs. Gaskell’s famous novel. With a cover design and a frontispiece by Edwin Wallick. Cloth, 12mo, \$1.25.

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PICTURE PLAYS

BY

MARGUERITE MERINGTON

Author of "Cranfeld: a Play," "The Vicar of Wakefield: a
Play," "Holiday Plays," etc., etc.



NEW YORK
DUFFIELD AND COMPANY
1911



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CONTENTS


	PAGE
THE LAST SITTING	9
<i>Picture, MONA LISA, by Da Vinci.</i>	
A SALON CARRÉ FANTASY	19
<i>Picture, THE MAN WITH A GLOVE, by Titian.</i>	
HIS MOTHER'S FACE	75
<i>Picture, UNE FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE, by Watteau.</i>	
A GAINSBOROUGH LADY	83
<i>Picture, THE DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE, by Gainsborough.</i>	
ARTIST-MOTHER AND CHILD	91
<i>Picture, MME. VIGÉE LEBRUN AND HER DAUGHTER, by Mme. Vigée Lebrun.</i>	
QUEEN AND EMPEROR	97
<i>Picture, QUEEN LOUISA, by Richter.</i>	
MILLET GROUP	119
<i>Picture, THE ANGELUS, by Millet.</i>	

In the stage directions right and left are used from the standpoint of the actor, facing the audience.

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THE LAST SITTING

Picture, Mona Lisa, by Da Vinci



THE LAST SITTING

CHARACTERS: DA VINCI *the artist and his sitter* MONA LISA.

The scene presents a section of the artist's studio in Florence in the first years of the sixteenth century. At the back, which is open, one sees a balcony, and beyond this the sky of late afternoon, gradually fading to a mellow twilight. Plants, flowers, statues, give the place a festive air. In the centre is a plain, dark screen, in which has been cut a frame-like opening. Behind this sits MONA LISA, a young woman in the early twenties, in the picture-attitude. Well down to one side, at his easel, is DA VINCI, a handsome man between forty and fifty, in rose-colored coat, and black cap from beneath which flow his dark curling locks, absorbed in his work. Before the curtains part, and for a minute or so after, men's voices to the accompaniment of a lute are heard singing:

*From a country far I came.
Strange the hap!
Ask not its name,
Place on the map!*

*But my heart beyond the sea
Knew your welcome waited me!*

*Such a little while —
Tear, song, and sigh,
Twilight and a woman's smile,
You and I!*

MONA LISA.

[As the song ends, with a sigh of rapture.]
O strain divine! Ferrara's music set
With lyric words befitting!
What means it all? Twin spirits met
Only to part, parting to meet again . . .
Like yonder crystal globes that play
At hide-and-seek beneath the fountain's spray;
*[Pointing to one side where a fountain is supposed
to be.]*
As pain mocks pleasure, sunbeams conquer rain!
Master! *[With sudden contrition.]* I spoil the sit-
ting!
A thousand pardons. I'll keep still.

DA VINCI.

Not so, Madonna. Speak and move at will,
The background while I sketch.

MONA LISA.

[Rising, comes from behind the screen.]
Background, in sooth!
*[Leaning on the balcony, she looks over, then turns to
him.]*
Below, a tempting parquet,
Lies Florence, jewel-bright with youth,

And all the singing pageantry of life!

From which I fain must turn to face

In fancy, what?

*[Indicating the front, as if it were a wall on which
her dreams were visualized during her sittings.]*

DA VINCI.

Your home.

MONA LISA.

Sole resting place

For fancy?

DA VINCI.

[With conviction.] Aye, Madonna, when a wife.

. . . Unless 'twere mass or market!

MONA LISA.

*[With a half-smile and a half-sigh, going to a mirror and
contemplating her reflection.]*

Poor Mona Lisa! Such reply

Might give Giocondo . . . he whose third am I!

*[After a slight pause she approaches Da Vinci, who is
busily at work.]*

Ser Leonardo, is, as men aver,

Art so to you a cloister

No woman boasts your love for her?

DA VINCI.

[Smiles, and pauses a minute before answering.]

Once on a time, a crab, all craft and claw,

Woody shellfish with crustacean wile.

Then, through the flattered fool's wide-open smile,
Plucked out its heart! The moral, pray you, draw!

MONA LISA.

[Laughs, but slightly ruefully.]

Crab I; you no such oyster!

*[Da Vinci nods a smiling assent. Again she speaks,
but this time seriously.]*

Is art love's foe, then?

DA VINCI.

[With a gesture renouncing the issue.]

Who can tell

If spark shall kindle altar-flame, or hell?

[The lady nods, as if to say, "I see your point-of-view, though without binding myself to share it!" and moves about the room, occupying herself with the flowers. Going behind the artist, she showers a handful of petals over him. Looking up, Da Vinci invites her attention to his work.]

MONA LISA.

[Exclaims, and claps her hands delightedly.]

'Tis wondrous strange: when to be painted, first

My good Giocondo brought me,

Strained glance and formal mien rehearsed,

Prim folded hands . . . like this! *[Illustrating.]*

Self-conscious smirk

As one who from her frame cries, "See!

"The great Da Vinci's self hath painted me!"

I deemed my sitter's tribute to your work!

But these four years have taught me . . . !

DA VINCI.

[Completing her thought.]

From fragment mood one gleans the whole;
Portrays, less hand, eye, smiling lip, than soul!

MONA LISA.

[Reflecting on this, speaks with some bitterness.]

The soul! A human soul! Poor wanton thing!
Sport of your beck and bribing!
Thus wide its prison-doors you fling
For thrush, caged swallow, ransomed from the
 mart . . .
Through pity of its lonely note?
Ah, no! Cold-blood, by rule to test, and rote,
Dipped wing and balanced muscle for your Art!
 [She moves away.]

DA VINCI.

[Has uttered a protesting "Oh, oh!" He now explains.]
That's Buonarotti's gibing!

MONA LISA.

[Earnestly; completing her analogy.]

Master, to bird or soul such flight
Spells —

DA VINCI.

Freedom!

PICTURE PLAYS

MONA LISA.

[Shakes her head mournfully.]

Song-void days, and mateless night!

DA VINCI.

[After a slight pause, picks up his brush again.]

Come; sit, Madonna, for the last time!

MONA LISA.

[Turns on him with a startled exclamation, then forces herself to speak calmly.]

Done,

My portrait, then?

DA VINCI.

Bows affirmatively.

The features.

Poised, Sphinx-wise, twixt coquette and nun,
Ever your smile eludes. . . .

MONA LISA.

Painter, or man?

DA VINCI.

*[Shrugs shoulders.]*Ask Time, artist whose master-skill
Puts the transcending touch! Unfinished, still
Divine, so bides my Christ-face at Milan!

MONA LISA.

And I, least of His creatures,
Bide . . . how?

DA VINCI.

Divine, grace of Art's brush,
Or . . . Choose! Woman by love revealed!
[*Throwing aside his brush, he strides a step or so toward her, then stands with extended arms, awaiting her choice.*]

MONA LISA.

[*Exclaims, shocked at the crisis she herself has invited.*]

Oh! Hush!

[*Picking up the artist's brush, she puts it into his hand, then quietly resumes her place behind the screen. DA VINCI bows, resigning himself to her decision, and goes back to his place, first, with a wave of his hand, giving a signal to the musicians, who would seem to be in a gallery to one side, but unseen by the spectator. Again the music sounds, men's voices accompanied by the lute, very softly and finally dying away. MONA LISA glances now and then wistfully at DA VINCI, but he soon becomes wholly engrossed with his work, as if no emotional passage between them had occurred. At last, with a slight sigh of final renunciation, she composes her features to her inscrutable half-smile as she gazes steadfastly on an imaginary world. And so are the curtains drawn upon the scene.*]

*To my country far I wend
Home my way,
While shadows blend
Darkness with day.*

*Throat of thrush and swallow's wing
Tidings of me still may bring!*

*Oh, such short-lived bliss:
Tear, song, and sigh,
Starlight, and a lover's kiss.
Then, Good-bye!*

A SALON CARRÉ FANTASY

*Picture, The Young Man with a Glove. L'Homme au
Gant by Titian (Tiziano Vecelli, 1477-1578).*



A SALON CARRÉ FANTASY

CHARACTERS: *Pictures, The YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE . . . L'Homme au Gant, THE WOMAN AT HER TOILET, supposed to be Laura Dianti. Other masterpieces, but unseen.*

HUMAN BEINGS: *The GLOVE YOUNG MAN; LAURA, an Art-student; Visitors to the galleries of the Louvre, including a HUSBAND and WIFE, an ELDERLY PARTY from the country with her niece, a TEACHER AND HER CLASS, and a rhapsodic GERMAN LADY; a GARDIEN of the Louvre galleries.*

TIME: *The present.*

SCENE: *The spot in the Salon Carré of the Louvre where hangs Titian's picture, L'Homme au Gant. In front of the railing which guards the walls is room for persons to pass. At one side is the regulation velvet-covered bench. On the other, at her easel, sits LAURA, making a copy of the picture.*

[*As the curtains part, the HUSBAND and WIFE enter from the right.*]

THE HUSBAND.

[*With catalogue, announces with authority.*]

Fifteen-ninety-two is L'Homme au Gant.

Ha! French!

PICTURE PLAYS

THE WIFE.

[Looking over his shoulder timidly corrects.]

Venetian.

THE HUSBAND.

L'Homme is French for man.

Gant, glove:

THE WIFE.

Titian. Venetian School. Just look!

THE HUSBAND.

'Tis not the question where he went to school.

L'Homme stamps him French.

THE WIFE.

[Timidly venturing a joke.]

Perhaps his gloves are French.

THE HUSBAND.

[Determined to find fault.]

Gant, glove, is singular. It should be called

A Man with Pair of Gloves. I shall report

The matter! Come! *[They pass to the left.]*

LAURA.

Oh, dear! Such people make

Me weary!

GERMAN LADY.

[Enters from the left. Speaks rapturously.]

Ach, du lieber . . . wunderschön!

[Some FRENCH VISITORS, entering, accidentally jostle the GERMAN LADY. Apologies are exchanged in their respective tongues.]

ONE FRENCH VISITOR.

[Looking at the picture.]

Superbe! Magnifique!

ANOTHER FRENCH VISITOR.

Pas grande chose! *[They pass on.]*

[The ELDERLY PARTY and YOUNG WOMAN enter, right.]

ELDERLY PARTY.

Who's this young feller?

GERMAN LADY.

Wunder-wunder-wunderschön!

ELDERLY PARTY.

[Consulting catalogue.] St. George

And Dragon! He's some dressy for a saint!

And, ef they haven't left the dragon out!

I allus had a notion I should like

To see one!

YOUNG WOMAN.

[Beckoning on the left.] Auntie! Over here!

PICTURE PLAYS

ELDERLY PARTY.

[*Joining the YOUNG WOMAN. Scrutinizes an unseen masterpiece.*]

Do tell!

Is that a dragon? Mercy, ain't he plain!

LAURA.

Cattle! Why don't they stay in home-pastures!
Not come and trample down Elysian fields!

[*Notices GERMAN LADY still enraptured.*]

Well, on my word, does she intend to spend
The whole day, wunderschöning here? I beg
Your pardon!

GERMAN LADY.

Fräulein?

LAURA.

You are not, as you

May think, transparent!

GERMAN LADY.

[*Apologetically, moving away.*]

Fräulein!

LAURA.

Thanks. The Louvre

Contains some other works of interest! . . .

The creature acts as if she thought she owned

This portrait! [*Jealously.*]

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

[*Slightly bored.*] Oh, ta, ta!

LAURA.

[*Agitated.*] What's that!
It seemed to move, to say —

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

Oh, ta, ta, ta!
[*Unable to believe the evidence of her senses, LAURA resumes work. TEACHER AND CLASS enter from the left.*]

TEACHER.

[*Dictating from Baedeker.*]

Giorgione's work.

Take notes. "A Rustic Festival."

CLASS.

[*Mechanically, taking notes.*]

Giorgione, Rustic Festival.

TEACHER.

[*Dictating.*]

Remark the depth and warmth of coloring,
Rich treatment of the landscape!

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

[*Looking at the picture.*]

I don't see

The landscape!

PICTURE PLAYS

TEACHER.

Well, it's here! [*Indicating Baedeker, then glances up at picture.*] Oh, wait a bit!

[*Turns over leaves, finding place.*]

The After-Dinner Concert . . . Magdalen

With Ointment . . . Here we are. Young Man in Black with Glove.

SOME OF THE CLASS.

[*Mechanically, taking notes.*]

Young Man in Black Glove.

OTHERS.

Black Young Man in Glove!

THE OLDEST PUPIL.

What must we say

Of this?

TEACHER.

[*Dictating.*] "An admirable portrait . . ."

CLASS

An admirable portrait.

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

Please. Portrait

Of whom?

OLDEST PUPIL.

[*Glancing up at picture.*]

Why, Portrait of a Man!

CLASS.

[*Glancing up at picture.*]

Of course!

TEACHER.

[*Consulting Baedeker.*]

No, no. "An admirable portrait of
His Middle Period."

CLASS.

[*Writing.*] His Middle Period.

OLDEST PUPIL.

How much must we admire this: *very* much?

TEACHER.

Marked with but one star, no; not *very* much.
In the Salon Carré, admire, of course.
One star, more admiration than for those
Without one. But unstinted raptures keep
For double-stars. For instance, this one, here . . .

[*Leading to the right.*]

St. Catharine — Correggio. All take notes.
Of which Vasari says —

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

[*Lingering.*] We don't have time

To see the pictures!

TEACHER.

[*Wearily.*] How can I help that?
An hour is all we have to do the Louvre!
“Of which Vasari says . . .” Take notes!

LAURA.

Barbarians! Of all
The hordes, nose-glued to Baedekers, that pass,
Scarce one is worthy to lift eyes to thee,
O masterpiece of masterpieces!

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

Oh, ta, ta!

LAURA.

Good Heavens, there it goes again . . . ta, ta!
Absurd. I'm dreaming. Eyesight overtaxed,
Nerves play me false. To work again. Right hand
A patch of light, significant that seems
To follow whither eyes direct, those eyes
Alive with challenge, charm! His gracile ease,
As on the parapet he leans, denotes
No haste. We catch him unawares. Near by
Some interlocutor — by which I mean,
God help me! — interlocutress, for whom
He feels a more than common interest!
Oh, for a miracle. Would that those lips
Might break the seal of centuries for me
To learn his secret!

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

Oh, ta, ta!

LAURA.

He lives,
Moves, speaks! It is too much to bear! Help! Help!
[Runs off, left, crying for help.]

GARDIEN.

[Hurrying on from the right.]
Au secours! Au secours!
[Seeing nothing demanding his services, he dusts the bench with his handkerchief.]

THE HUSBAND.

[Entering from the left.]
Do come!

THE WIFE.

[Following, looking back, to the left.]
But that poor girl in trouble!

THE HUSBAND.

[Taking his wife's arm and steering her, right.]
Well,
Don't look! Don't meddle with . . . How dare
you, sir!
[Bumping into Gardien who is going to the left.]

GARDIEN.

M'sieur! Mille pardons!

THE HUSBAND.

Certainly not. You ought to be discharged!

[*Going to the right, sees a picture further on, exclaims.*]

Bless my soul!

That red-head hussy yonder, doing up
Her hair, while someone, obviously a man,
Holds up two looking-glasses! Shameless thing!

[*Putting up eyeglass to get a better view.*]

THE WIFE.

Oh, exquisite! A Titian!

THE HUSBAND.

A disgrace!

If this is what art's coming to —!

THE WIFE.

My dear,

That's an Old Master!

THE HUSBAND.

Old enough to know
Much better. I shall write a letter to
The Times about it!

[*Exclaims, as the YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE, leaning forward, knocks his hat over one eye.*]

What a draught! But where
Can it be coming from!

*[Again exclaims, as the YOUNG MAN knocks his hat
which he just has righted, over the other eye.]*

And where can it
Be going to! I shall report it! Come!

[He goes to the right, the wife following.]

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

*[Laughing, emerges from his frame, vaulting neatly over
the railing.]*

A neat revenge; eh, compari?

UNSEEN PICTURES.

Bravo!

Bravissimo!

THE WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

*[Enters from the right, gathering some rich drapery about
herself.]*

Red-head, indeed, and hussy! I can't wait
Till closing time, Signore, to express
My warmest gratitude . . . I fain would say
My heartfelt, had I but a heart; for this
Your gallant championship! *[Curtseying.]*

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

[Bowing low.]

With pleasure duty lies in your behalf.
Madonna . . . Laura Dianti, I believe?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

A point on which historians divide!
The name suits me as well as any! You,
Signore, were baptized —?

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

In oils alone!

Unsired, came I into this picture-world!
No human mother bore me that I knew!
Even as you I sprang from hand and brain
Of the Vecelli! But what man he used
As manikin to fit my features on,
Have I forgotten, if I ever knew!
As for a name, oft I amuse myself
By filching one from passers-by! To-day
Carlo of the Neroni seems to ring
Not unbecomingly. What think you?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Fine!

From whom derived?

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

A letter that I found
Beside this easel. Charley Black, 'tis signed.
Which I translated . . . But why do we stand?
My frame why not enter with me awhile?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[*Hesitating.*]

I fear 'twould cause remark!

UNSEEN PICTURES.

[*On the left, warning.*]

Look out!

[*The Woman at her Toilet runs away, right.*]

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

[*Looking toward the left.*]

We're safe. 'Tis only the custodian
Of our security! . . .

[*Leans against wall while GARDIEN passes across, left
to right.*]

St. George, come down
From your high horse and fence!

ST. GEORGE.

[*Unseen.*]

Sorry,
Dear boy, but there's a fine for breaking ranks
In exhibition hours!

[*Murmurs of assent from other unseen pictures.*]

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

Oh, very well!

I'll take a turn among the Later Dutch,
Or through the Spanish School!

[*Cries of "Stop him! Stop him!"*]

What can I do?

If I play here you all complain that I
Disturb the Holy Families!

PICTURE PLAYS

UNSEEN PICTURES.

[In succession.]

You do!

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

[Whimsically, keeping count.]

See, now! Murillo's; Rembrandt's; Raphael's,
And all the rest!

ST. GEORGE.

At times, dear boy, you act
Just like a silly human being!

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

[Protesting.]

Oh,

St. George!

SEVERAL UNSEEN PICTURES.

'Tis true!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[Coming again toward the Young Man.]

Signore, neighbor, friend,
And, strongest bond, co-Titian. Have a care.
I speak for all in saying that, of all,
Are you the highest note, last cry in art
That's personal!

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

[*Striving to be modest about it.*]

So commentators say!

And who am I that should contradict!

A GRUFF VOICE.

[*On the left.*]

'Tis naught so much to brag of, my young blade!

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

[*Looking in the direction of the Voice.*]

Indeed, Poussin's Diogenes . . . It was

Poussin's Diogenes, I think, that spoke?

DEEP, SOLEMN VOICE.

You talk too much for the Salon Carré!

You should be hung among the Moderns!

[*Others murmur, as if this were too severe.*]

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

Oh,

St. Michael! Though you are a Raphael

Touched up a bit, indeed, 'tis said, by —

[*Loud cries of "Order! Order!"*]

ST. GEORGE.

Invidious reference to pedigrees

Is barred!

[*Loud cries of "Hear, Hear!"*]

PICTURE PLAYS

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

True. Still I think he should withdraw
The slur of modernism!

ST. MICHAEL.

I refuse

To enter talking-lists! Sublimest art
Is ever silent! I have spoken!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Hush!

Provoke him not! Remember, he's a Saint!

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVE.

[Laughing, gracefully yields the point.]

Heaven be thanked, I'm secular! One gets
So much more harmless pleasure out of art!
But, to our mutttons. You were saying, what?
Something about my Middle Period!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Sir, long ago it was constated, you
Express most fully life-in-art to life
That speaks in terms of life, not terms of art!
[Cries of "Hear, hear!"]

ST. GEORGE.

That hits the nail where rarely nail is hit
By womenkind!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

My thanks, St. George! 'Tis not
 My own, though! . . . Then, I'm just a bit that
 way
 Myself! [*General laughter.*] [*To the Young Man.*]
 Sublimest heights you may not scale. . . .

ST. MICHAEL.

No; not by many a league!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

I quite admit
 My single-starred estate! [*General laughter.*] I would
 not brag,
 By that same token, though, am I not, well,
 More popular than others I could name
 In this collection?

ST. MICHAEL.

I don't understand
 A word he says what time he tries to talk
 St. George's English.

ST. GEORGE.

Oh, not mine! Echoes
 Of text-book, tourist jargon, student slang!

PICTURE PLAYS

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[Drawing the YOUNG MAN forward.]

Listen. I fear not, as our neighbors do,
Your frolic humor, lifelike charm, may bring
Our cinquecento into disrepute.
'Tis for yourself I plead!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

[*Puzzled.*] You plead for me,
Madonna?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Aye. And for another!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Who . . . ?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

A woman!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Dio mio! Dare I hope . . .?

[Advancing toward her.]

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[Retreating.]

Ah, no, no, no! Misread me not! Oh, who
Are you and I to play at life and love —
To breathe, even, of mysteries that lie
Our shadow-world of canvas, paint, beyond?

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

[Musingly.]

And yet, if only dimly sensed, why not?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[Always with increasing feeling.]

O fateful power, poised in bold relief
Against your dusky background, so to seem
Alert into a world of flesh and blood
To spring!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

[With growing life-quality.]

Yet, for one human hour, why not!
Come, let us forth into the sunlit groves,
Where birds are singing, you and I?

[Holding arms out toward her.]

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

For you

It would be death!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

With you, why not?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Alas!

Ser Tiziano in another mood
Contrived me! You clean-cut may break away,
Our prison roam at will!

PICTURE PLAYS

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

[*Laughing.*] A fiction! Hark:
Outposts of Renaissance I cannot pass!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

But I only a few steps may achieve.
And, see! the damask how I tear away!
[*Drawing drapery closer about herself.*]

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

My strength shall draw you, draw you, draw,
All barriers across!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[*Almost yielding.*]
We should be missed!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

What then? "Another scandal in the Louvre!
Two masterpieces missing, raped, no doubt,
By some trans-ocean plutocrat!" While hand
In hand we fare to Italy!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[*Looking toward the right.*]
Oh! The patrol!
[*The two duck behind the bench as the GARDIEN passes
through, right to left, then rise.*]
[*Just then the GERMAN LADY enters from the right.*]

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Heavens! Here comes the Wunderschöner! Hide!
[*They duck again.*]

GERMAN LADY.

[*Begins, rapturously.*]

Ach, wunder . . .

[*Breaks off, rubs eyes, staring at frame.*]

[TEACHER and CLASS enter from the right, the
YOUNGEST PUPIL leading.]

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

Please, I want another look
At the Young Man with . . . Why, he isn't there!

TEACHER.

Nonsense! Of course he's there!

CLASS.

[*Echoing.*]

Of course he's there!

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

But, look!

TEACHER.

He must be there! It says so here! In Baedeker!

PICTURE PLAYS

GERMAN LADY.

[Loyally, going to the left.]

Ach, Wunderschön!

TEACHER.

[Leading the way back, right.]

Come, come!

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

[Lingering, unconvinced.]

He must have just stepped out!

[The YOUNG MAN and the WOMAN rise from their hiding-place.]

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

So few there are

To whom we bear a real message . . . Come!

In native Italy fullness of life

Awaits us! Oh, once more to be where first

We saw the light!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

The light saw us, you mean!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

One time were man and woman we, altho

Till now have I denied it, knew it not!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Ah, no, no, no!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Already feel you not
A quickening? A something here?
[*Hand on heart.*]

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[*Puts up hands as if to ward off danger.*]

Ah, no!

Have pity!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Come . . . to life! Come back to life,
I should have said!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Heaven, be merciful!
For us there is no life — there never was!
What man and woman sat for us, long since
Are dust, their souls with God!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Then what are we?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Poor simulacra only, that reveal,
By grace of art, life to the living, yet
Have none ourselves. Half-lengths — 'Tis all we are! —
Below the frame-line we are just inferred —
As Titian would have rendered us, as 'twere,
From waist to toe! — By lifelikeness beguiled,
If life's forbidden fruit to taste we seek,
We perish!

PICTURE PLAYS

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Then, what woman meant you now?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Poor fool adoringly long hours who spends
Before you at her easel!

[*Pointing to LAURA's copy.*]

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

[*Laughs.*] Oh, ta, ta! [*Examines copy.*]
Ye shades of Titian, what a travesty!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

E'en as the call of life to you and me
To be forever blotted out would mean,
One step across the line, her world from ours
Dividing, for that girl spells madness!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

[*Shocked at the idea.*] Oh!
Though mortals rank a race inferior
To art-creations —

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

I should say so!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Still,
Their suffrage 'tis on us confers our claim
To immortality! Sooner than harm

A hair on silly head of one, then, I
Could wish myself a landscape, seapiece, aye,
Truncated cherub, even! anything
But what I am!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[*Applauding.*]

Oh, worthy of our School!

[*Voices are heard on the left.*]

But, hark! Quick! Quick! Back to our frames!

[*The two hurriedly return to their places, the WOMAN going to the right, the YOUNG MAN getting into his frame.*]

[*The GLOVE YOUNG MAN enters from the right.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Laura! Hey, Laura! . . . Why, they said I sure
Should find her here! I must have lost my way
Again. [GARDIEN *passes through from left to right.*]
Conductor!

GARDIEN.

Eh, m'sieur?

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Is this Saloon carre? [*Mispronouncing.*]

GARDIEN.

[*Enquiringly.*] M'sieur?

PICTURE PLAYS

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Or words

To that effect?

GARDIEN.

[*Shrugs shoulders, deprecating inability to understand.*]
M'sieur! [*Passes on.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

I give it up!

[*Sits, pushes hat on back of head, consults guide-book.*]

THE HUSBAND.

[*Entering from the right, followed by the wife.*]

We'll cut the rest. We've seen
Enough to say we've seen them! And go get
A cup of tea, if decent tea is found
In Paris!

THE WIFE.

I should like a bun, if one
Can find one!

THE HUSBAND.

[*Dogmatically.*] Bun is a French word.
I've heard it frequently!

THE WIFE.

But bun in French
Does not mean English bun!

THE HUSBAND.

[*With finality.*] In English, French,—
In any language bun means bun! What else
Could bun mean, except bun — just bun!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Closes guide-book, rising.*]
Since English doesn't work
I'll try my French! Ahem! Pardon, monsieur!
Comprenez-vous anglais? [*Speaking laboriously.*]

THE HUSBAND.

Certainly not!
How dare you ask me! Come!
[*Leads wife away, to the left.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

I give it up! [*Sinks back on bench.*]

ELDERLY PARTY.

[*Entering from the left with YOUNG WOMAN.*]

They're very fine,
No doubt, but give me cheerful art, like Pigs
In Clover, Dancing in a Barn. Or things
That make you cry. Last Days of Pompeii!
Pictures of common things, home-folks you know!
That's my style!

YOUNG WOMAN.

[*Protesting.*]
Auntie! Shocking! This is ART!

PICTURE PLAYS

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Guess I'll try my French on this bunch! . . . Hem!
Parlez-vous Français, s'il vous plaît, Madame?

YOUNG WOMAN.

[*Explaining to the ELDERLY PARTY in undertone.*]
I think he's asking you in French if you
Speak French!

ELDERLY PARTY.

[*Flustered, asks YOUNG WOMAN.*]
Do I speak French or do I not?
And how in French shall I tell him if I
Speak French or not?

YOUNG WOMAN.

Leave him to me! [*Gets out conversation manual.*]
"Non, ma chere marraine, le soldat n'as pas avalé le
tisonier, mais la femme du boulanger a un petit chien
chinois." [*Slowly, reading.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Fine day, indeed, as you remark! . . . I give it up!
[*He is about to go, when the ELDERLY PARTY recog-
nizes him.*]

ELDERLY PARTY.

Ef it ain't Charley Black!

YOUNG WOMAN.

Why, so it is!

Why, Charley!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Mrs. Johnson! Mandy! This
Is great! [*They shake hands.*]

ELDERLY PARTY.

What brings you here?

YOUNG WOMAN.

ART, same as us,

Of course!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Not on your life. For one thing, gloves.
I'm buyer for our firm, you know. And, next,
The usual thing.

YOUNG WOMAN.

A girl!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

The girl! She's here
Somewhereabouts, messing with paint!

YOUNG WOMAN.

Maybe

I know her. Reddish hair and rather plain?

PICTURE PLAYS

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Hair auburn. Girl a peach! . . . Why, there she is!

Laura! [*Looking toward the left.*] Laura, dear!

ELDERLY PARTY.

[*Making signs to YOUNG WOMAN, and going away, right.*]
Two's company.

YOUNG WOMAN.

[*Following, looks back, appraising LAURA.*]

Distinctly red, and plain!

LAURA.

[*Coldly.*]

Charles, this is a surprise!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Intended so!

But, say a joyful one!

LAURA.

I — I — My breath

You've stolen!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Trying to kiss her.*]

Sweetheart! Let me give it back!

LAURA.

[Repulsing him.]

So public!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[Looking about.] Not a soul in sight. Unless
You count that guy there! *[Indicating portrait.]*

LAURA.

Mr. Black! I beg,
Insist, that you withdraw. . . .

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[Puzzled.]

What, guy?

LAURA.

[Shudders.] The word,
Also your person, from this Presence!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

What

In thunder do you mean!

LAURA.

[Teeth on edge.]

Thunder, indeed!

*[She resumes her painting. Puzzled and discom-
fited, the GLOVE YOUNG MAN sits on the bench.]*

PICTURE PLAYS

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[After a pause.]

Delightful weather. Though a thunderstorm
Seems in the air! *[Another pause.]* Not a bad-look-
ing guy. . . .

Beg pardon! *[Rises and bows to the portrait.]* Indi-
vidual!

And, from his sample there, he carries quite
As fine a line of gloves as I myself!

LAURA.

[Rises, shrieks, waving paint-brush.]

Creature!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Referring to yours truly?

LAURA.

Aye!

Begone!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[Unable to believe it.]

Begone means Git? Skidoo?

LAURA.

Translate

As pleases you, but do it!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[Looks at her in silence, then turns to go, but suddenly changes his mind.]

I'll be hanged

If I . . . What ails you, girl?

LAURA.

I can't explain.

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

You loved me. . . .

LAURA.

Rather, thought I did!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Nonsense!

You loved me well enough to promise — Yes,
You promised.

LAURA.

[Wildly.]

Spare me this remembrancing!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

What makes you talk so queerly!

LAURA.

Who are you

To comprehend, were I to tell!

PICTURE PLAYS

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

You try!

Poetry-stuff's not my long suit, but I
Can do a lot of comprehending! Fire
Away! . . . [*Sits.*] Engagement's off?

LAURA.

It never was!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

What's come between us? You're the only girl
In all the world for me! And I am just
The same old Charley-boy you've always known!

LAURA.

[*Hands over ears, shudders, then apostrophizes picture.*]
Forgive, O Masterpiece, this squalid scene!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Why, where does he come in?

LAURA.

[*Takes a sudden resolution, and addresses GLOVE YOUNG
MAN.*]

The I erstwhile
You knew no longer am the I you see!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Considers this.*]
I'm getting it! Go on!

LAURA.

Into mine own
Came I, this very hour!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Yea, verily!
Go right ahead!

LAURA.

To me hath been vouchsafed
Behind the veil to glimpse, art's face that screens
From gaze profane!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Airily.*] I haven't an idea
Where we are bound for, but we're on the way!

LAURA.

To-day I start upon a pilgrimage!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Starts up.*]
Where . . . where's your ticket taken to?

LAURA.

[*Impressively.*]

This spot!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

She's crazy! [*Falling back into seat.*]

LAURA.

Standing here, shall I be drawn
Across the border-line dividing art
From life, as such as you conceive it!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[*Unseen, mournfully.*] Oh!
[*Mournful echoes resound through the gallery.*]

LAURA.

[*Listens, a moment, puzzled, then continues.*]
Absorbed, as 'twere, in yonder dusky shades.

[*Indicating portrait.*]
Forth into sunlit groves the real I
Shall fare, and not alone! in Italy!
[*The mournful exclamations are repeated with intensity.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Wrought up to passion.*]
She's mad! This is your work, you villain, you!
[*Throws his gloves into the face of the portrait.*]
[*LAURA shrieks wildly; cries of indignation from all the pictures are heard. There is a flash of lightning, followed by a loud thunder-clap. Then the YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE and the WOMAN AT HER TOILET are seen in the foreground, together.*]

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

'Tis as I feared! Oh, save her!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

. . . And ourselves!

[Together the two stand, arms upraised, appealing.]

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE and WOMAN AT HER TOILET

O comrades! Ye Co-Masterpieces, here
 Collected! In the sacred name of art
 Avenge the insult that, offered to one,
 Is offered to us all!

[Cries from UNSEEN PICTURES of "We will!"]

Saints Michael, George,

Of Raphael. . . .

THE TWO SAINTS.

Here! Here!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Works of Poussin —!

UNSEEN PICTURES.

Here!

YOUNG MAN WITH GLOVES.

Correggios! Michelangelos! Rembrandts!
 Da Vincis! Rubens'! Antony Van Dycks!
 Paolo Veronese! Rembrandts!

[All answer to the roll-call.]

Help, in the name of Titian, and of art!

[There is a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a terrific thunder-clap. When the momentary darkness passes it is seen that the YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE

and the WOMAN AT HER TOILET have disappeared; LAURA is lying on the bench, swooning, or asleep, while the GLOVE YOUNG MAN is in the picture-pose, within the frame:]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[After a pause, breaking his picture-pose, addresses an imaginary audience.]

Yes, it's me all right,
The same old Charley-boy you know! I can't explain
My present straitened circumstances, but
I'm quite aware how foolish I must look!

UNSEEN PICTURES.

[Menacingly, with a clash of swords.]

Hush!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[Leaning forward, addresses them.]

Ladies, Gentlemen, and Landscapes!
This is an honor I did not expect!
But since 'tis thrust upon me. . . .

UNSEEN PICTURES.

Hush! *[As before.]*

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

I won't hush! . . . May I smoke? . . . Oh,
very well!

If no one wants to play. . . . But just you wait!

*[Resumes picture-pose. GARDIEN passes through,
right to left.]*

Hey, Conductor! Stop this car! I want to get out!
Conductor!

[GARDIEN *passes on without noticing him. Pictures threaten as before.* ELDERLY PARTY and YOUNG WOMAN *enter from the right.*]

ELDERLY PARTY.

I wonder how them two young courtin' folks
Is gittin' on! . . . Say, Mandy, don't this look
Like Charley Black! [*Staring at GLOVE YOUNG MAN.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Raising hat.*]

Oh, Mrs. Johnson! Mandy! How-de-do!
Would you mind calling up a messenger?
Of course I'm doing this for pleasure, but . . .

ELDERLY PARTY.

It is his living image!

YOUNG WOMAN.

[*Shocked.*]
Indeed? Why, Auntie, this is Art!
[*They go out, left.*]

Charley Black,

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

I'm art,

Am I? We'll see!

UNSEEN PICTURES.

Hush! [*The HUSBAND and WIFE enter from the left.*]

THE HUSBAND.

[*Looking about.*] This is the room
We started from. We've lost our way again!
These galleries are wretchedly mapped out!
I shall report . . .

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

 Beg pardon! I myself
Have lost my way, and so if you . . .

THE WIFE.

 My dear!
That portrait raised its hat to me!

THE HUSBAND.

 What's that?
How dare you, sir, take such a liberty!
[*Shaking his fist at the* GLOVE YOUNG MAN.]

THE WIFE.

I think he wants to know the time! . . . Quarter
To five!
[*Consulting her watch, tells the* GLOVE YOUNG MAN.]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

 [*Groans.*]
What, nearly time to close!

THE WIFE.

 My dear,
He's telling us it's nearly time to close!
Most civil of him!

THE HUSBAND.

A disgrace to Art!
I should report the matter if I knew
To whom such matters are reported! Come!
[*Leading the Wife away to the right.*]

THE WIFE.

[*Bowing politely to the GLOVE YOUNG MAN.*]
Most civil!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Groans. UNSEEN PICTURES cry, "Hush!" He then shouts.*] Help! Help! Police! [*Again the Pictures silence him. From the left the GERMAN LADY returns, and from the right the YOUNGEST PUPIL.*]

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

I want to see
If he's come back!
[*The GERMAN LADY begins, "Ach Wunder—" but breaks off, rubbing her eyes.*]

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

Oh, it's someone else!

TEACHER.

You're dreaming! It's the same!

CLASS.

Of course it is!

PICTURE PLAYS

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

He's changed his clothes, then!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Dear young lady, I
Am Charley Black. This is my business card.
If you would be so kind. . . .

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

Oh! He's alive!

TEACHER.

He can't be!

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

But he is! Aren't you alive?

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

I am, indeed; the livest ever. Though
That's not exactly news to me!

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

He is!

He says he is himself!

TEACHER.

[*Leading the YOUNGEST PUPIL away, right.*]

He can't be! If
He were 'twould say so here in Baedeker!

CLASS.

Of course!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

This grows monotonous! [*Notices GERMAN LADY still gazing at him, puzzled.*] Although
Not introduced, if you would be so kind —

GERMAN LADY.

[*Shrieks, running away to the left.*]
Ach, du lieber. . . .

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Wearily.*] Gesundheit!

GERMAN LADY.

[*Returning, says with conviction.*] WUNDER-
SCHÖN! [*Goes.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*After a slight pause.*]

I never was more highly entertained!
Yet one may have too much of a good thing.
Then, too, there's business to attend to. So
If this distinguished company would drop
A hint how long the game will last —

[*It grows dark. From both sides pictures in their frames steal forth, only their backs being presented to the audience. They stand in a semicircle opposite the YOUNG MAN. He bows jauntily.*]

Why, how-de-do! . . . I trust you like my looks!

[*It grows constantly darker. Mutterings of thunder*

are heard from time to time, mingled with the clash of swords.]

Will someone kindly press the button, call
A waiter? . . . Or if any gentleman
Will lend his hat and half a dozen eggs,
I'll make an omelette! . . . No? . . . Look
here,

Fair play! How long am I in for: for life?

[Pictures bow assent.]

No commutation for exemplary
Behavior, eh? *[Pictures shake themselves as if saying
no.]* . . . I move that you adjourn!

[Pictures signify no.]

Oh, very well!

[He whistles. The sword-clash grows louder.]

I see! Life's short but art is long! Is that
Your motto? *[Pictures signify assent.]* You intend
to kill me?

[Pictures assent.]

So!

The ayes would seem to have it! Go ahead!

Once in a lifetime only can one die!

And as an angel I would sooner be

The real article than just a sham,

Old, tarnished, cracked, and canvas-back, like —

*[There is a terrible clash, while the pictures seem to
close about the YOUNG MAN. Suddenly the WOMAN
AT HER TOILET runs in from the right, shrieking.]*

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Spare him! Spare him to me!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Good gracious! Who
Is this enthusiastic but somewhat
Imperfectly attired young female! Miss,
Your name escapes me, but . . . my business card!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

As hostage let him live, to me enchained!
Price of the masterwork a mortal's love
This day destroyed! I ask it in the name
Of Titian and of Art!

UNSEEN PICTURES.

So be it!

OTHERS.

Amen!

[*The Pictures in evidence retreat.*]

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Come! [GLOVE YOUNG MAN *descends from frame.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Kindest thanks for timely help! But — who —?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Come forth into the world with me!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Aren't you

Afraid of taking cold?

PICTURE PLAYS

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Not while the sun is shining, and with you!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Sunshine is so uncertain. If you had
A rag of fringe, a lambrequin, a sash,
To patch you up a bit! And then your hair —

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Am I not beautiful the way I am?

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Too beautiful by half!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

One cannot have
Too much of beauty! So all artists say!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

But my dear Miss . . . or Madam, is it? I
Am not an artist! Such a thing — tap wood!
Has never happened in our family!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Your time has come! Not artist; work of art,
Like to myself, I'll render you! Take off
Those hideous clothes!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

My goodness gracious me!

UNSEEN PICTURES.

Do as she bids!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

How many and how much
Will satisfy the Louvre proprieties?

[*Reluctantly preparing to remove his coat. LAURA,
who has wakened gradually, now sits up with a
gasp.*]

LAURA.

Why, Charley Black! What would your mother say!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

If only it were mother! . . . Do you mind
Turning your back?

LAURA.

How dare you!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Oh, I dare
Do all that may become a work of art!
Who dares do more is none!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Oh, bravely said,
And worthy of our School! [*Cries of "Hear, hear!"*
from UNSEEN PICTURES.]

LAURA.

[*Noticing the WOMAN for the first time, advances on her.*]

You scandalous
Young Masterpiece — or, rather, Mistresspiece!
Go right back to the frame where you belong!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Never! Take you my place! With him I go,
When he is decently undressed!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Ruefully.*] I'll wreathe myself in smiles!

LAURA.

You will, will you! Oh, Charley Black!
What shall I do! [*Bursting into tears.*]

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

[*Suddenly appears at her side.*]

Absorbed in yon dusk shades,
Emerge . . . and not alone! in sunlit groves
In Italy!

LAURA.

[*Shrieks.*] How dare you! Get right back
Into your frame! Charley, put on your coat
And come with me!

UNSEEN PICTURES.

Do as he bids!

LAURA.

I won't!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Fear not!

Although a chromo, as compared to us,
Ill-dressed, pretentious, modern at its worst,
Your hair is not unTitianesque, your lines
Susceptible of change!

LAURA.

You horrid thing!

Charley, why don't you knock him down?

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

We waste the daylight! Come! [*Trying to lead the
GLOVE YOUNG MAN to the right.*]

UNSEEN PICTURES.

Do as she bids!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Ruefully, to LAURA.*]

Sorry, my dear! This lady seems to have
A lien upon me! — At your service, ma'am!
We'll take a taxi to the nearest shop,
Outfitted with a raincoat, rubber shoes,
Hairpins and usual et ceteras
You won't feel quite so, well, conspicuous
In Paris!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Wanted to the gaze am I
 Of the admiring throng! As breath of life
 To me their plaudits are! O welcome chance
 On exhibition so to place myself!
 Then, come!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

And you, into the background thrust
 A hundred years or so haply may learn
 Humbly, upon your knees, the rudiments
 Of all you glibly chatter now about!

UNSEEN PICTURES.

[*With a menacing clash.*]

Do as they bid!

LAURA.

I won't! I'd sooner die!
 Charley, forgive me! It is you I love,
 While as for you — You cinquecento dude —

[*There is a terrible sword clash, followed by lightning and violent thunder. When the darkness clears the YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE is seen in his original attitude within his frame, while the WOMAN AT HER TOILET has disappeared. LAURA is composedly gathering up her painting materials, the GLOVE YOUNG MAN, fully equipped, assisting her.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Storm's over. [*Picking up the easel.*]

LAURA.

[*Looking at her study of the picture.*]

'Tisn't really good!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

[*Admiring it.*]

Oh, yes,

It is, though!

LAURA.

[*Comparing it with the original.*]

No. I know enough to know

What I don't know! Still, I will keep it as

A souvenir. [*Dreamily.*]

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Of what?

LAURA.

[*As if waking, laughs.*]

I do not know.

Charley, he looks a little bit like you!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Well, I can stand it, if he can! This way!

[*Leading Laura to the right.*]

I saw a picture of a red-haired girl. . . .

Like you!

[*They laugh, and kiss.*]

GARDIEN.

[*Passing through.*]

On ferme!

PICTURE PLAYS

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Where would you like to spend
The honeymoon: in Italy?

LAURA.

N-no!

That's too exciting. Just some quiet place!

GLOVE YOUNG MAN.

Why not Niagara?

LAURA.

[*Agreeing.*]

Niagara!

GARDIEN.

[*Again passing through.*] On ferme! On ferme!
[*The lovers kiss again and pass out on the right.*]

GARDIEN.

[*Again passing through.*] On ferme!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

[*Advances stealthily a few steps from the right.*]
Signore . . . Our ruse succeeded!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

So it seems,

Madonna!

WOMAN AT HER TOILET.

Fare you well, then!

YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE.

Fare you well!

[*The WOMAN AT HER TOILET disappears on the right. THE YOUNG MAN WITH A GLOVE becomes a picture again. The light fades. The GARDIEN, again passing through, cries, "On ferme!" on which the curtains are drawn.*]

HIS MOTHER'S FACE

*Picture, Une Fête Champêtre, Jean Antoine Watteau
(1684-1721).*



HIS MOTHER'S FACE

CHARACTERS: JEAN ANTOINE WATTEAU *in his last hour*,
a SISTER, and a BOY.

The stage is divided from right to left by a screen which, when only the forefront is illuminated, represents the wall of a room. When light is thrown on the back scene it serves as a misty veil that lends an effect of illusion to the pictures there presented. These pictures, groupings from the well-known canvases of Watteau, are supposed to be conjured up in the fancy of the dying artist, the spectator sharing his supernatural vision. The SISTER and the BOY, however, who are ministering to him, betray no consciousness whatever that the room has ceased to be bounded by a wall.

The curtains, parting, disclose a simply furnished room. At one side, toward the front, on a couch lies Watteau, the SISTER and the BOY in attendance on him.

WATTEAU.

[*Rousing himself.*]

Sister, brush and palette bring me.

Play, Jeannot, on your guitar.

While I paint, some ballad sing me.

Faring on a journey far,

Sieur Watteau, Academician,

For one sitter's portrait calls
On remembrance, art-magician,
Ere the final darkness falls.

[*The SISTER having complied with his request, he makes an effort to work.*]

THE BOY.

[*Sings to his guitar.*]

Days of Liesse! Days of Liesse!
Season of wreathèd lovers, song, and spring!
Come, warm me with your old-time tenderness,
Before my soul takes wing!

[*The wall at the back of the room seems to dissolve, and, as if in a dream, appear phantasmagorial groups of Watteau Cavaliers and Ladies, in a garden presided over by a statue of Venus. Exclaiming, the artist moves, as if to advance toward the vision, then sinking back, waves it away.*]

WATTEAU.

Gallants, dames, of courtly fashion,
Butterflies of ballet corps,
Airy forms of painted passion,
Pass! Binds me your spell no more!
[*The vision fades.*]

THE BOY.

[*Sings to his guitar.*]

Enchanted Isle! Enchanted Isle!
Who has not known your lure when youth is fair?
But, of all barques that seek ye this long while,
What one has anchored there!

WATTEAU.

For Cythera not embarking —
Ah, how oft I've made the start! —
Back to Valenciennes I'm harking,
Home that holds my Flemish heart!

In a simple tiler's cottage
Fronting on the market-square,
Spinning, mending, making pottage,
Praying, bides my mother there!

[He paints a little. The SISTER moves softly about the room, ministering to his comfort, while the BOY plays a few measures. Then, with a reminiscent smile, WATTEAU pauses in his work and speaks again.]

Oh, those merry Saturnalia,
In the reign of St. Pansard,
Clad in Carnival regalia,
Then at Easter, dying hard!

And, neath Abbey walls monastic,
Gilles, Cassandra, gay Margot,
Mezzetin of trick fantastic —
These are the old friends I know!

THE BOY.

[Sings to his guitar.]

*Oh, Valenciennes! Oh, Valenciennes!
Homing, my heart seeks yours at set of sun
To join the buoyant women, stalwart men,
Who dance, their day's work done!*

[Again the wall dissolves, and a vision appears, this time of Flemish peasants dancing, as in the picture La Vraie Gaieté. Then follow Gilles, and his companions of the Strolling Italian Comedians; Cassandra, Margot, Mezzetin, Pantaloon. Extending his arms toward these, the artist exclaims with joy. When the vision fades he sinks back on his couch with a sigh of satisfaction. The SISTER, who has been sitting quietly watching him, rises.]

WATTEAU.

[Looks from the SISTER to a crucifix on the side-wall, then to her again.]

Symbol of the Crucifixion,
Sister, now I fain would kiss!

[The SISTER brings him the crucifix, but in the act of taking it, the artist pauses, his eye arrested by the crudity of its workmanship, and he pushes it away with a gesture of repulsion.]

Ah, there lies no benediction
In such travesty as this!

[With a gentle smile, as of one humoring a child, the SISTER replaces the sacred symbol. The BOY, meantime, plays a few soft, desultory measures. Picking up his brush, with it the artist outlines a cross in the air, then again essays to paint. After a futile stroke or so, however, his nerveless hand drops to his side. Then, gathering his faculties for a supreme effort, he speaks, slowly, but distinctly.]

Sieur Watteau, at thirty-seven,
Decorate by royal grace,
Leaves his master-work to Heaven,
Just — my dear — old — mother's — face!

[The brush drops from his hand as his head sinks forward, then back on the pillow. The watching SISTER makes the sign of the cross.]

THE BOY.

[Sings to his guitar.]

*In Valenciennes, in Valenciennes
Players no more frequent the market-place,
And I to Heaven now must turn, as then
To see my mother's face!*

[Slowly, noiselessly, the curtains are drawn.]

A GAINSBOROUGH LADY,

A Christmas Masque.

Picture, Study for a Portrait (The Duchess of Devonshire), by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788).

These verses are reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons from Scribner's Magazine for January, 1902.



A GAINSBOROUGH LADY

CHARACTERS: A GAINSBOROUGH LADY in a picture.

Also a Gainsborough GENTLEMAN, supposed to be the subject of the portrait which is the LADY'S next-door neighbor on the wall of a gallery. As the GENTLEMAN remains invisible and enforcedly silent throughout the scene his proximate presence is inferred solely by the LADY'S addressing her discourse to him.]

THE LADY, suitably framed, is revealed, but in deep shadow. Soon a clock in the distance musically strikes the hour of twelve, upon which a pallid moon-beam, gradually becoming bright, falls on the picture. When this is fully illuminated the LADY slowly comes to life.

THE LADY.

'Twas prophesied
Some Christmas dawning,
'Twixt midnight and morning,
Would speech to us restore!
[*She peers from her frame about the gallery.*]
My husband-lover, do you live
Below?
Or upward soar?
If he were near I'd know; he was so talkative!
[*Sagaciously wagging her head.*]

Withal, the sweetest soul that ever sinned and died!
"Gad's life" [*reminiscently she strikes the attitude of
a connoisseur*], "now stab my vitals if they ain't
A credit to the artist's paint!"
('Twas Colley Cibber spoke!) "So time will show!"
The day we sat for Gainsborough, some hundred years
ago!

[*Looking farther from her frame first to one side,
then the other, on her right she evidently recog-
nizes her neighbor, for she utters an exclamation
of delight, while a tender smile lights her face.*]

Then it is you!

How I have wondered —!

After being sundered

A century — or more!

[*Evidently the GENTLEMAN would have liked to set
her right, for she cuts him off sharply.*]

Oh, yes! insist on those odd years!

Altho'

Touching that score,

Your own accounts, my dear, were always in arrears!

'Twas monstrous shocking how your debts were overdue!

[*The GENTLEMAN would seem to wish to deny this.*]

But, if you'll let me speak for once, 'tis quaint

To spring to life from canvas, paint,

And be just boy and girl, just belle and beau,

As when we sat for Gainsborough, some hundred years
ago!

Sometimes, indeed,

In sunbeam's glinting,

I have said, "He's squinting,

"That gentleman next door!

"Pleased with my eyes, perchance, my shape,

"Some beau,

"Perhaps some bore!

"Who would a picture-gallery acquaintance scrape!"

[*The GENTLEMAN probably would like to protest*

"'Pon my life!" but she checks him.]

Now, now, you know you cannot innocency plead!

You know as well as I you were no saint!

A man of flesh and blood, not paint!

[*The GENTLEMAN's eyes must be rolling, for the
LADY waves him back, as it were, to herself, while
virtuously drawing her 'kerchief closer about her.*]

Yon frescoed nymphs were never taught to sew

As we who sat for Gainsborough, some hundred years
ago!

It seems, then, dear,

Long ages flitting,

Here we've hung unwitting!

(I trying to ignore

The flirt presumer by my side!)

When, lo!

One moonbeam froze

Quickens our portraits into life, bridegroom and
bride!—

'Twas God who joined us living, dead, the auctioneer!

But hearts beat on as hearts, behind attainment

Of coating varnish, garish paint!

Love can a fairer immortality bestow

Than that we sat for Gainsborough, some hundred years
ago!

What matters age!
Since fortune chancy
Yields this hour, in fancy
We'll live the sweet life o'er —
Though each be but poor pictured ghost
A-row! —

When you shed gore
To win the season's belle, the town and tavern toast!
(My dear, I'm modish still! This hat is all the rage!)
You fought!

[*Her change of tone indicates that the GENTLEMAN
would disclaim this.*]

You did! That duel was no feint!
'Twas crimson blood, not crimson paint,
You rogue! and crimson wine you caused to flow,
All in the days of Gainsborough, some hundred years
ago!

Do you recall
That sweet pursuing,
Fleeing game of wooing? —
The night this frock I wore? —

[*She listens. Faint strains of phantasmal music are
heard.*]

It echoes in remembrance yet. . . .

High, low!

We hold the floor! [*She makes a deep curtsy toward*

the GENTLEMAN, then takes steps to the music.]

The violins play Boccherini's minuet,
And you are sparking me at Lady Betty's ball!
These hands poured wine, prepared confectioned daint
(Your heart and stomach were not paint!)
Next time you called . . . these lips did not say
No! . . .
All in the days of Gainsborough, some hundred years
ago!

I won't deny
That you were trying!
[Obviously the GENTLEMAN would protest.]

Ah, 'tis useless lying!
I have known you to snore
After your dinner, and in church!
'Tis so!

But to the core
Fine! Never leaving foe or comrade in the lurch!
An English gentleman of a good school gone by!
I love you aye, sweetheart, despite restraint
Of framing canvas, fading paint!
And, speak! Don't you . . . ?

[She holds out her hands to the GENTLEMAN, but, as
just then the distant sounds of dawn make them-
selves heard, suddenly checks his impending ad-
vance.]

Hush, hush! That shrill cock's crow
Says, "Peace, who sat for Gainsborough, some hundred
years ago!"

[The concluding words die on the LADY'S lips, as, re-

suming her original attitude, she stiffens slowly again into a portrait, while the moonlight fades into the gray of dawn.]

ARTIST-MOTHER AND CHILD

*Picture, Mme. Vigée Lebrun and her Daughter by Mme.
Vigée Lebrun (1755-1842).*



ARTIST-MOTHER AND CHILD

The curtains parting, disclose MME. VIGÉE LEBRUN and her little daughter, behind a suitable frame, in the picture-pose. The effect is as if the spectator, through a transparent wall, had caught a glimpse of them in their living-room, a blank wall of which forms their background. MME. LEBRUN is gazing intently toward the front, supposedly studying their reflection in a looking-glass. Against her contentedly nestles THE CHILD. Soon, satisfied with the result of her observation, MME. LEBRUN, always behind the frame, reaches for painting materials that lie beyond the scene, and prepares to work on a small study for the picture she is projecting. Suddenly the sound of distant firing is heard. She pauses, brush in hand. When the firing is followed by a rough shout of triumph, and a snatch of the Marseillaise, she drops her brush and clasps THE CHILD to her bosom hard.

THE CHILD.

What ails my mother, in yon looking-glass
Our portrait studying she trembles, turns white?
Why drops her brush whenever people pass,
Marching, hurraing through the streets? . . . So
tight
You clasp, it hurts!

[MME. LEBRUN caresses the CHILD soothingly, and, picking up her brush, resumes work. Every now and then the distant echoes of revolution are heard. Soon the CHILD speaks again.]

How gay seems Paris! Guns
Firing! Who is the Saint whose fête with praise
Is being kept?

MME. LEBRUN.

Called by her red-capped sons
St. Liberty; her hymn the Marseillaise.
[A slight pause.]

THE CHILD.

This portrait, will you give it me to keep,
If still I stand and am, oh, very good?

MME. LEBRUN.

Perhaps some fairy, when you are asleep,
Will turn it into pretty frocks and food!
[The CHILD laughs and claps her hands delightedly.
There is another pause during which MME. LEBRUN
works.]

THE CHILD.

King, Queen, why never go we now to see:
Louis the kind, fair Marie Antoinette?

MME. LEBRUN.

[Trying to speak lightly.]
No more at Trianon or Tuileries,
Their new address have they not sent us yet!

[*There is another pause, during which a louder note of revolution is heard, and a red flash as of flame is seen. MME. LEBRUN listens anxiously, but as it dies away, resumes work.*]

THE CHILD.

Know you the artist Madame Guillotine?

MME. LEBRUN.

Child! [*Horrifed.*]

THE CHILD.

[*Proud of imparting news.*]

Aye! Commissioned by France, heard I said,
Soon will she execute our king and queen,
But not as did you, full-length, just the head!

[*A snatch of the Marseillaise again is heard. MME. LEBRUN gives way to sudden, silent weeping.*]

THE CHILD.

Mother, dear, see, where on our portrait fell
Tears! [*Distressed.*] Mother, let me kiss your tears
away!

MME. LEBRUN.

[*Wiping eyes, and forcing cheerfulness.*]

Aye, for I work in oils, not aquarelle!

[*Prepares to resume work.*]

Come!

THE CHILD.

First at counting-out suppose we play!

[MME. LEBRUN'S *lips form the word "counting-out" as if this held an ominous note, then lending herself to the child's humor, holds her again in the picture-pose, while together they croon a little nursery rhyme.*]

MME. LEBRUN.

Marguerite of Paris, lend me your slippers gray!

THE CHILD.

And we will go to Paradise on this sunshiny day.

MME. LEBRUN.

Where we shall see the little birds that Jesus made of clay!

THE CHILD.

Each evening in the chapel old he lights the candles,
without doubt.

MME. LEBRUN.

Bread.

THE CHILD.

Pipe.

MME. LEBRUN.

Bridge of gold.

TOGETHER.

The prettiest child goes out!

[*They kiss, then fall into silence, in the picture-attitude.*]

[The curtains close.]

QUEEN AND EMPEROR

*Picture, Portrait of Queen Louisa, by Gustav Richter
(1823-1884).*



QUEEN AND EMPEROR

CHARACTERS: KING FREDERICK WILLIAM III *and* QUEEN LOUISA *of Prussia*; *their two sons, the* CROWN PRINCE FRITZ *and his younger brother* WILLIAM; *their infant daughter* LOUISA. *The* COUNTESS VOSS, *Mistress of the Queen's Household.* BARON VON HARDENBURG, *Generals* SCHARNHORST *and* BLÜCHER. *Two* MAIDS *of the Queen's retinue.* *The infant Princess's* NURSE. *Of these only the principals need appear. The others may be inferred from being addressed.* NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, *Emperor of France*; TALLEYRAND-PERIGORD, *his Minister of Foreign Affairs.*

SCENE: A hall in a house at Tilsit.

TIME: July, 1807.

To render this scene effective great care must be exercised in the stage management. The QUEEN throughout is the pivotal person, the central figure. At no moment is the full group in view; the characters press forward as the text requires, those invisible lending their assistance by exclamations indicative of the emotions roused — hatred of BONAPARTE, love of the Fatherland, and the like. In minor details historical accuracy has obviously been sacrificed to dramatic effect. The two princes did not accompany their mother to Tilsit, PRINCESS LOUISA was not born till

the year following the truce. Nor does Richter's painting, the final tableau, represent the Tilsit lodging. The main story, however, lies close to fact. In the short dialogue between mother and lads the general pictorial effect should follow the painting by Steffeck, QUEEN LOUISA and Her Two Elder Sons on the Luisenweg near Koenigsberg. For the scene between the QUEEN and NAPOLEON a hint may be gathered from Gosse's picture. Portraits of FREDERICK WILLIAM III, COUNTESS VOSS and others may be found in historical works. The final tableau shows Richter's painting of QUEEN LOUISA. For this, by a simple mechanical contrivance the picture area must be narrowed, the frame closing in so as to present the solitary figure on the stairs in the right picture-proportion.

[As the curtain rises the QUEEN'S maids laden with wraps and hand-baggage are seen, disappearing up the stair. The royal party enters from the left, the KING, bareheaded, escorting the QUEEN, who is in travelling attire.]

THE KING.

This, dear one, is our lodgment. Poor the best
The fiend allows us. [*He sighs. The others groan.*]

THE QUEEN.

[*Cheerfully.*] It will serve. A comb,
Water to cleanse this travel-soil, and then —
Napoleon! [*The others sigh heavily.*]

THE KING.

[*With solicitude.*]

Louisa, did I well
To countenance your coming? Hardenberg,
The Czar, all think your woman's wit may win
Some peace for Prussia far beyond the terms
The monster yields to our diplomacy!
But an that devil Corsican you fear
To meet —!

THE QUEEN.

I fear! [*Laughs.*] Daughter of Mecklenburg,
And Frederick William's wife! [*Kisses the KING.*]
That I may fail,
Ah, that alone I fear! And yet if one,
One fort, one smallest village, aye, one foot
Of earth for our beloved Fatherland
I gain I shall not wholly fail!

[*The KING embraces her, while the others cry "Long live her Gracious Majesty Queen Louisa." The QUEEN, having acknowledged the demonstration, continues.*]
What mannered brute
This mushroom Emperor? [*Checks the KING who is about to reply.*]
Nay; tell me not.
I'll meet him unprepared, unprejudiced.

THE KING.

A brute describes it. Just a brute, replete
With ill-got conquest. Tyrant, petty, mean.
The Czar, myself, his guests enforced, his slaves,

Almost I said! — he heaps with insult, guised
As compliment! [*The others groan.*] Oh, we must
dine with him!

Our sweet society he'll not forego!
And so, bethink you, I, who love the meal
At homely noon, now eat at eight at night!
Not born to such convention, yet the beast
Would change the clock, elect himself a god —
Napoleon! [*Great demonstration from the rest.*]

THE COUNTESS VOSS.

[*Impressively.*]

He apes the English. More,
He passes them! Their heathen dinner hour
Absorbs the afternoon, I'm told, from four
To five! [*A shocked murmur from all.*]

THE QUEEN.

[*Excited.*]

Hope! Hope! Huzzah! A ray of hope,
The first! Who apes, mark you, that thing he fears;
And by that thing he fears will some day fall!
O little upstart, self-elected god,
Invincible no more proclaim yourself!
Unwitting your Achilles heel you've bared!
Oh, I could hug those English!

THE KING.

[*With a caress.*]

Optimist! [*Sighs heavily again.*]
Noon or nocturne, his bread sticks i' my throat!

But I — [*Breaks off with emotion.*] 'Tis for my Prussia! [*Cries of "Long live His Gracious Majesty."*]

[*With a caress.*]

The hour of tryst approaches! Take the boys!

'Tis ages since you've seen them. Mark their growth!

[*The NURSE with the INFANT advances. The QUEEN shows the KING.*]
See!

The love!

Her Royal Highness lacks a name!

Louisa for her peerless mother! Yet,
O hapless child, our kingdom in the dust,
What crownèd heads will dare to sponsor thee?

A fig for kings and queens who hold aloof
From sorrow! Goethe, Schiller, all
Blood-princes of the realm of intellect,
In spirit lay your hands upon her brow!
And, present, Blücher, grim old warrior;

Dear Scharnhorst, who have cleft your upward way
With consecrated sword to noble heights;
Germans of Germany, where'er ye bide,
Godparent this poor infant; guide her steps
In ways God-fearing, like your own, to Heav'n!

[Presenting the child to the group. All press about her with great demonstration and cries of "Long live Her Royal Highness Princess Louisa!"]

They go, singing: "All hail, our Gracious King!
Long live our noble King, God save the King!"

THE KING.

You'd hearten stones! *[Kisses her hands.]* Until we
meet again!

PRINCE WILLIAM.

[Clinging to the QUEEN'S right arm.]
I'll go pick you some cornflowers. And yet
'Tis said that blossoms blue mean hope deferred,
Desires beyond fulfilment!

THE QUEEN.

Thus they bring
Sky to our earth!

THE CROWN PRINCE.

[On the QUEEN'S left.]

Stoop, Mother. Whisper low.
You're fighting for the throne . . . my throne to
be!

Yet . . . whisper! I don't want to be a king!
 Poor father, see how sad it makes him! Then
 Last Christmas did not Santa Claus pass by
 Our wretched palace? No gift-laden tree
 He brought, for, sooth, we're children of a king!

THE QUEEN.

[Tenderly.]

My Fritz, our burdens 'tis not ours to choose!
 Come, lift your head! That's my brave lad! Now say
 The little catechism that we made
 Together!

THE CROWN PRINCE.

Crown Prince am I

Of Prussia.

PRINCE WILLIAM.

[Takes his brother's hand.]

I am your next brother!

BOTH PRINCES.

And in our veins flows blood of Frederick
 The Great. And we do dedicate our lives
 To our lov'd Fatherland to set it free!

*[Each then takes a hand of the QUEEN and kisses it.
 They join their father. PRINCE WILLIAM suddenly
 runs back to his mother. NAPOLEON, attended by
 TALLEYRAND, enters on the left. They pause, un-
 seen by the Germans, listening.]*

PRINCE WILLIAM.

Is't true the devil Bonaparte has horns,
Cleft hoof, and tail?

THE QUEEN.

[Between laughter and tears.]

Indeed I would 'twere true,
For that would make me laugh instead of —
[Turns, runs upstairs with a slightly hysterical laugh.
The boys go off with their father. NAPOLEON and
TALLEYRAND advance, laughing.]

TALLEYRAND.

A flattered portrait, Sire, they paint of you!

NAPOLEON.

[Shrugs shoulders.]

Our guest, dear Frederick William the Third
Of Prussia has been writing letters home!
[Takes snuff.]

TALLEYRAND.

The lady's tardy!

NAPOLEON.

Early rather I.
My whim to catch her off her guard! Poor soul,
We'll grant her grace to don her bauble crown!

TALLEYRAND.

Interpreted, which favor means the terms
Of Tilsit's Truce the Tilsit Peace will stand,
Unmodified by fair Louisa's plea?

NAPOLEON.

Now, Talleyrand, much as I love the sex,
Whene'er did woman's wiles deflect my star?

TALLEYRAND.

[Shrugs shoulders.]

Or soon or late the greatest conqueror —
'Tis writ on high! his Armageddon meets.
To witness, Cæsar!

NAPOLEON.

[In sudden panic.]

Talleyrand! You mean
Some ambuscade, some Brutus' dagger waits
My breast?

TALLEYRAND.

[With malign joy.]

Oh, Sire! The name upon my lips
Was Cleopatra's!

NAPOLEON.

[Recovers poise.]

Pish! Scoffer, begone!
For, hark! Yon nervous clearing of the throat,

A dainty frou-frou, and light-tripping step
Announce my suppliant!

[*Urges TALLEYRAND off at the left.*]

TALLEYRAND.

Surely you need
Protection, Sire?

NAPOLEON.

From Cleopatra? Nay;
I'm Cæsar, not Mark Antony!
[TALLEYRAND bows and goes. *The QUEEN, attired as in Richter's picture, but crowned, as in Gosse's, descends. NAPOLEON meets her halfway, takes her hand, conducts her down a stair.*]

THE QUEEN.

[*Curtseying.*]

Your Imperial Highness!

NAPOLEON.

[*Bowing over her hand.*]

Your Majesty! [*Releases her.*] Welcome to Tilsit!

THE QUEEN.

I thank you, Sire. But Tilsit's Prussian soil!
So Tilsit cries its own welcome to me!

NAPOLEON.

[*Aside.*]

Impertinent!

THE QUEEN.

But you, Sire, find yourself
In Tilsit welcome?

NAPOLEON.

[*Bows with mock courtesy.*]

Thanks. On Prussian soil
Myself, my legions, count ourselves at home!

THE QUEEN.

[*Sighs.*]

Not mine with you to bandy words. I come
To — [*Looking up for the first time breaks off with a
start.*]

NAPOLEON.

[*Maliciously.*]

Aha! Confess you miss horns, hoof and tail!

THE QUEEN.

[*With sincerity.*]

I own, your portraits wrong you, only show —
[*Breaks off.*]

NAPOLEON.

Speak freely!

THE QUEEN.

So, or not at all. They show
An — well, adventurer!

NAPOLEON.

And so I am!

THE QUEEN.

Yet who to arrogance of conquest brings
The brow of Cæsar's innate majesty!

NAPOLEON.

[*Aside.*]

The Siren, would she Cleopatra me?
Best be on guard! Permit like compliment.
A queen? A goddess rather. Child of Zeus,
Athene. Aphrodite's self!

THE QUEEN.

Pray, Sire,

Spare mockery. In print for all to read
Have you set forth disparagement of me:
"Cheap intrigante," and "would-be Joan-of-Arc,"
"A petticoated politician who
"The State embroils, sheds blood for pastime!" Worst,
My wifely fame have you not scorned to slur!

NAPOLEON.

Madame, upon my honor. I protest —

THE QUEEN.

We'll put that by. Not for myself, I plead
For Prussia.

NAPOLEON.

Well, with Prussia what's amiss?

THE QUEEN.

A fatal malady. Surfeit of France!

NAPOLEON.

A general infection, so it seems,
Through Europe. To return to petticoats,
What fabric this? [*Touching a fold of the Queen's
dress.*]

THE QUEEN.

[*Bitterly.*] Chiffons? At such time, Sire,
Shall we discuss chiffons!

NAPOLEON.

'Twould interest

The Empress.

THE QUEEN.

Josephine — her heart, 'tis said,
Is kind. Her husband she adores, as I
Mine. O, to my entreaties might she add
Her gentle voice!

NAPOLEON.

[*Aside, bitterly.*] Children this woman bears,
Sons, lusty, beautiful! In fine, Madame,
What will you?

THE QUEEN.

Germany for Germans; that,
No more, no less!

NAPOLEON.

[*Sneering.*] Too modest the request!

THE QUEEN.

We ask but for our own!

NAPOLEON.

What, with my troops
In Berlin, Danzig, Magdeburg?

THE QUEEN.

What's that
But hostile occupancy, while the toll
You claim as war's indemnity, sad price
Of brave young blood that had been better spent,
Is highway robbery?

NAPOLEON.

By any name
Shall I exact it.

THE QUEEN.

[*Advancing a step.*] Ah, Napoleon!
You love your kin. A thousand proofs declare
How close the tie. So dear, dearer, to me
My children!

NAPOLEON.

[*Aside.*] Sons, princes of royal blood
Bears she her mate! — So close, indeed, kin's tie
That brothers, sisters, and in-laws I crown
Sov'reigns!

THE QUEEN.

[*With sarcastic laughter.*]

Kings, queens, made overnight,
Turned out by wholesale from a factory,
And dealt out broadcast, like a pack of cards,
Over the map! Like poets, kings are born,
Not made. It takes an ancestor or so,
Some generations, to produce a lawn,
A monarch, and a gentleman!

NAPOLEON.

[*Bows.*] Some hold
That genius is sufficing ancestry!
You think, Madame, the skies will fall unless
On Prussia's throne a Hohenzollern sits?

THE QUEEN.

[*Bows assent.*]

While Hohenzollern draws the breath of life,
Born, bred to lofty service, in the name
Of country, home and God, with heart that beats
Within a mighty people's heart! Napoleon,
Leave not the Fatherland a cripple, maimed,

Broken of spirit. Take your victor's slice,
But one small portion, independent, free,
Leave to our ancient right and privilege!

NAPOLEON.

A healthy, growing little enemy
Outside my gates?

THE QUEEN.

Not so. Your neighbor, friend!

NAPOLEON.

My friends I buy — and sell my neighbors!

THE QUEEN.

Then

God help you!

NAPOLEON.

As He does. God always fights
Upon the side with big battalions!

THE QUEEN.

God help you in the day when Germany
Returns your call in France!

NAPOLEON.

Not mine that day!

THE QUEEN.

Not yours; a Hohenzollern's. We shall live,
Despite Napoleon!

THE PRINCES.

[*Without.*] Mother! Where's our mother!

NAPOLEON.

Sons! . . .

Your Majesty, deign to accept. . . .

[*Plucks a rose and offers it to the QUEEN.*]

THE QUEEN.

Dear God!

I ask a kingdom and he offers me . . .

NAPOLEON.

A rose, no less, no more!

THE QUEEN.

Alas! We fail.

'Tis Heaven's will we fail! My comfort this;
The worse our failure, speedier our day
Of vindication. Triumphs bought with blood,
Empires founded on hate, by hatred fall.
Undompted England has a word to say.
And, lo! the first weak point your armor shows,
Your admirable poise the least disturbed,
Without a neighbor, friend, God pity you!
We Germans fail to-day, our treasure drained,
Our lands partitioned, e'en ourselves enslaved.
And yet to the last gasp our hearts beat high
For Germany, our souls belong to God!

[*She makes a low obeisance and retires upstairs.*]

NAPOLEON.

A plague upon the woman with her sons!
[*Throwing down the rose and trampling on it.*]

TALLEYRAND.

[*Entering from the left.*]
You called me, Sire?

NAPOLEON.

[*Sardonically.*] You eavesdropper!

TALLEYRAND.

 Ah, say,
You diplomat! [*Both laugh.*] And how found you
the Queen?

NAPOLEON.

A handsome woman with a fluent tongue.
Ye gods, how she ran on! [*Affects to yawn.*]

TALLEYRAND.

[*Aside.*] How he is moved,
All white and trembling! And the Tilsit Peace?

NAPOLEON.

Remains as drafted.

TALLEYRAND.

 Not one single point
Conceded to the lady?

NAPOLEON.

Did I know

Terms harsher than we've made —!

TALLEYRAND.

[*Picking up the rose.*]

Your Majesty

Has dropped this peace-token?

NAPOLEON.

[*Snatching the rose, throws it back into the face of the Minister.*]

You devil, you! [*He strides off to the left.* TALLEYRAND laughs silently. *The lights are lowered.*]

TALLEYRAND.

[*Looks toward an unseen window.*]

A storm? A passing cloud!

THE PRINCES.

[*Outside, call.*]

Oh, Mother, dear!

TALLEYRAND.

[*Musingly.*]

To-day, Napoleon's! But in the end . . .

THE KING.

[*Outside, calling.*] Louisa!

THE PRINCES.

Mother!

[TALLEYRAND takes a pinch of snuff and follows NAPOLEON.]

THE QUEEN.

[*Answering, calls.*]

Coming, dears! [*The lights, now bright, show her, in a narrowed frame, descending the stair, as in Richter's picture. She pauses, reflecting.*]

THE QUEEN.

[*To herself.*]

Failure!

As advocate for Germany, I've failed!

And yet —

THE KING.

[*Heard, nearer.*] Louisa!

THE PRINCES.

[*Nearer.*]

Mother!

THE QUEEN.

Coming, dears!

[*The curtains close on her, as she pauses, holding a thought of hope, in spite of present failure, for the future of Germany.*]

A MILLET GROUP

*Picture, The Angelus (L'Angelus du Soir), by Jean
François Millet (1814-1875).*



A MILLET GROUP

CHARACTERS (Taken from Millet's paintings).

<i>The Man with the Hoe</i>	<i>L'Homme à la Houe</i>
<i>A Mother and Child</i>	<i>La Sortie</i>
<i>Two Washerwomen</i>	<i>Les Lavandières</i>
<i>A Youth</i>	<i>Le Semeur</i>
<i>A Husband and Wife</i>	<i>L'Angelus du Soir</i>

The VOICE OF MILLET heard in a snatch of song.

The frame must be proportioned, the scene prepared, for the final tableau, The Angelus. At one moment or another each picture is presented, the characters not belonging to it dropping naturally to right and left, as if passing and repassing in a field. The dialogue is accompanied by a simple, natural action except when a picture-attitude is being held, when a natural pause must be achieved. Before the curtains are drawn a horn is heard in the distance, and the tinkling of cowbells. Then silence. The curtains drawn disclose the field of L'Angelus du Soir, but with the solitary figure of THE MAN WITH THE HOE, L'Homme à la Houe, occupying the stage. He remains immobile for an appreciable time, till the picture shall have been recognized and the spirit of the scene imposed. Then the MOTHER carrying her child, La Sortie, appears at the right. The Mother stands, watching the MAN, for a short space, then speaks.

THE MOTHER.

A sou for your thoughts!

THE MAN.

[Turns as if wakened from sleep.]

Eh? My thoughts? *[Laughs.]* That's a joke!
Now and then when my back is a-weary I pause,
Draw a breath, wipe the sweat off! *[Suits the action
to the word.]* But, thoughts . . .!
Are you troubled with such?

THE WOMAN.

[Advancing.] I don't know! As a girl
I read fairy-tales; dreamed as I dusted and span
Or helped in the field!

*[Laughter is heard. From the left come the two
WASHERWOMEN with their baskets. They halt, see-
ing the others.]*

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

On my word! One would think 'twas a funeral, feast,
That you're stopping to chatter!

THE MAN.

[Indicating the MOTHER with a jerk of his head.]
She's telling her dreams!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

[With curiosity.] Has she dreams?
*[From the right comes the YOUTH, whistling. He
also pauses.]*

THE MOTHER.

[*Apologetically, disclaiming the notion of indulging in dreams.*] Oh, not nowadays! Now I'm too old! I'm turned twenty! But, oh! as a girl how I looked For a prince to come wooing, and clothe me in silk; Jewels fine as the crown on our Lady! A coach, Horses white as your linen, to carry me off To a castle with servants to wait on me! . . . Well, I must go get my good man his supper. All day He's been carting manure! [*Moves as if to go.*]

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

Ha, ha, ha! And those dreams?

THE MOTHER.

I pass on
To my baby! [*She talks to the infant. From the left enter the HUSBAND and WIFE, with pitchfork and wheelbarrow, gathering potatoes.*]

THE WIFE.

Well, well! How she grows! Healthy, too!

THE MOTHER.

Aye. I'm hoping to keep her. The others —

THE WIFE.

[*Sympathetically.*] I know.
So with mine. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

[*Folding linen.*]

He takes more in proportion than gives!

THE OTHERS.

[*Shocked, exclaim.*] Oh, Louise!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

But it's true, as we country-folk know. He takes youth,
Health, and beauty, and hope. And he gives in re-
turn . . . ?

Why, not even a grave!

THE MAN.

Aye; there's something in that!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

[*Bitterly, working herself up.*]

To the earth are we born, and the earth all our days
Must we till for a meagre subsistence, backs bent,
And our faces, like beasts', to the earth! Look at you.

[*To the MAN.*]

Like some crooked old tree! Do you think like a man?
Do you feel like a man among men? Why, this hoe
Is as human as you, you old stick-i'-the-mud!

THE WOMAN.

Oh, Louise!

THE MAN.

[*Nettled.*] I don't know about that!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

Well, I do!

[*She goes over to the Mother.*]

As for you with your prince of a dung-heap. . . .

THE MOTHER.

Hold your tongue! Jealous cat, you!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

Me jealous! Of you! [*Laughing scornfully.*]

THE HUSBAND.

[*Interposing, pacifically.*]

Come, now, lasses! Don't quarrel!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

[*Snapping her fingers at him.*]

Potato-face!

THE OTHERS.

[*Some shocked, the rest amused.*]

Oh!

THE WIFE.

[*Infuriated.*]

Don't you dare call my man such a name!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

[*With sudden tenderness, strokes the WIFE's cheek.*]

Poor Adèle!

Scarce nineteen, and all furrowed and brown, like the earth!

But you never rebel!

THE WIFE.

[*Mollified.*] I rebel? There are times
When life's hard —

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

Is there ever a time when it's not?

THE WIFE.

But I always have Jean!

THE HUSBAND.

[*Indicating the WIFE.*]
Jean has her!

THE MAN.

Aye, that's true!

THE VOICE OF MILLET.

[*Singing, on the right.*]
Oh, Normandy! My Normandy! Again to see my Nor-
mandy! [*All turn enquiringly.*]

THE YOUTH.

[*Shading his eyes, the better to see.*]
'Tis our neighbor, the artist, Millet. He's been off
Selling pictures in Paris. He must have come back
By the Fontainebleau stage!

[*The snatch of song again is heard, receding.*]
From his song he's had luck
With his market!

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

It's time. Months behind with his rent!
And their bills . . . ! Butcher, baker, unpaid for —
how long?
Not a shop in Chailly gives them credit!

THE WIFE.

Poor souls!

With nine children to feed!

THE MOTHER.

And his wife — she's not strong.

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

Bailiffs soon will be put in possession, they say,
Of the house, unless money's forthcoming!

THE WIFE.

Poor souls!

With nine children!

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

You can't blame the tradesmen! Monsieur
Is an artist, you see!

THE WIFE.

He means well, all the same.

THE HUSBAND.

[Nods assent, while continuing his work.]
A good fellow!

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

He's lazy. I've seen him, myself,
By the hour, lying back on the heather!

THE MAN.

Well, well!

THE MOTHER.

On the heather? His wife is too patient! If I
Caught my man . . . !

THE YOUTH.

He has told me — he's watching the sky!
[*All exclaim, derisively.*]

THE MAN.

[*Rather apologetically for himself as well as for Millet.*]
Well, I do that myself, now and then, just to see
If 'twill rain.

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

He's no farmer, or peasant, like us!
What's the weather to him!

THE YOUTH.

It's the forms of the clouds
That he studies. He's told me! the colors that change
With the day. Oh, it's just like a poem, the way

That he tells it! . . . The trees of the forest, he
says,
Speak a language their own! And the birds, and the
wind —!

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

He's a lazybones!

THE MAN.

Hm! Now I doubt if he's right!
[*Taps forehead significantly.*]

THE HUSBAND.

All the same, a good neighbor, kind heart, at a time
When there's trouble!

THE WIFE.

But — nine! And he looks at the sky!

THE YOUTH.

But he works! Oh, I don't mean just painting! He
digs
In his garden of mornings! His roses are fine,
And his cabbages . . . well, you can't beat them!

THE WIFE.

Poor soul!

He has need, with nine children!

[*The voice of MILLET again is heard in a snatch of
song.*]

THE YOUTH.

Just hark how he sings!

He's so glad to be home!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

Fancy. Glad to be here!

Fancy! Glad to leave Paris! An artist at that!

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

[Helping the other to fold a sheet.]

Oh, not really an artist! Why, look what he paints!
Nothing nice: parks with fountains and ladies with
fans,

And guitar-playing lovers! Such ev'ryday things.
Just a field, such as this. Why, you almost can smell
The potatoes, the newly-turned earth, or the wheat
As the harvesters bind it, the linen we wash,
In those pictures of his!

THE MAN.

Aye! There is something in that!

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

And his people, just peasants like us!

THE MAN.

Aye; that's true.

And so ugly! *[Naïvely.]* Why, he's painted me!

*[Unconsciously falling again into the picture-position.
The others laugh at him.]*

THE HUSBAND.

[*With a slight, reminiscent grievance.*]

Aye. Myself and the wife here have stood for him.

Decked

In our Sundayfied best, for the Barbizon fête,
There are worse-looking couples! But Monsieur Millet
Is for painting us just as you see!

THE WIFE.

But, poor soul!

He means well!

THE YOUTH.

But that's beauty! He told me. Ourselves
As God meant, tillers, toilers of earth, with God's sky
Overhead! And I feel, when, in sowing the seed,
With a prayer the first handful I toss in the form
Of a cross — [*Instinctively acting it out he falls nat-
urally into the position of "The Sower."*] Then I
feel — [*He breaks off, smitten with self-con-
sciousness.*] I lack words, but I feel
What our neighbor puts into his pictures!

THE MAN.

[*Not knowing what else to say, says*] Well, well!

THE MOTHER.

[*Sitting on the edge of the HUSBAND'S wheelbarrow.*]
When I wanted to put on my earrings at least —
Who's to know that one has them if not! Said Mon-
sieur,

Mother-love was adornment enough! Mother-love
Makes the face of a woman divine, be she queen,
Or just peasant, like me! [*Cuddling her infant.*]

SEVERAL.

Well, there's something in that!

THE WIFE.

[*With some faint apprehension of the finer thing.*]
And I, too, when it's cool and the evening is still,
The potatoes all stacked, from yon church at Chailly,
When the bell rings the Angelus —
[*Breaks off, lacking expression, and picks up another
potato.*]

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

[*Has listened attentively. She now breaks into mocking
laughter.*]

Clots of earth! Clots of earth, clots of earth, ev'ry one!

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

[*Resentfully.*]

Clot yourself! Aren't you one of us born?

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

Being born
Isn't all of one's life! Soon this Barbizon soil
I shake off, change sabots for silk stockings, and shoes
With high heels like a lady's! You'll see!

THE OTHERS.

And what then?

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

[*Balancing her basket on her head.*]

And then . . . Paris!

THE OTHERS.

Louise!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

And then, Paris! [*Going.*]

THE OLDER WASHERWOMAN.

[*Following her.*]

Louise!

THE YOUNGER WASHERWOMAN.

[*Is heard, laughing, and repeating.*]

Paris!

THE MAN.

[*Preparing to go.*]

You can't blame her. Life's hard, as she said!

THE WIFE.

Oh, not blame!

Shall one blame what the good God permits? But at
least

One can pity and pray! [*Crossing herself.*]

PICTURE PLAYS

THE MOTHER.

[*Going.*] Well, my man will be in
From the field!

[*The YOUTH drifts away, whistling Millet's song.*]

THE HUSBAND.

[*Shaking down the potatoes in their sack.*]
Life is hard, as she said. But at least —

THE WIFE.

[*Completing his thought.*] Aye. At least,
God be thanked! we're together!

[*Millet's voice again is heard softly in a snatch of
song.*]

THE HUSBAND.

[*Recurring to a former train of thought.*]

But as for him yon
And his pictures . . . ! [*Shakes his head, resigning
the subject.*]

THE WIFE.

Poor soul! He means well!

[*The daylight, bright at first, gradually has declined
to twilight. As HUSBAND and WIFE, their work
ended, prepare to leave the field, from the tower of
Chailly church rings the evening Angelus. Setting
down barrow, planting pitchfork, the two bow their
heads in prayer, repeating*]:

“The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,
And she conceived of the Holy Ghost.

Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with
thee. . . .”

[*The bell grows fainter and fainter. The words die
on the lips of the man and woman. The figures
become motionless, as if the scene were being trans-
lated from the realm of reality to that of fantasy.
Then the curtains are drawn.*]

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